

Our Boys and Girls

THE SECRET.

By "F. L. Vee."

(Known to the readers of The Presbyterian as "Patsy.")

Mrs. Carlton was in her big, sunny kitchen, icing a cake. As she stepped into the dining room for something she glanced out of the window and saw a breathless, little figure running up the street. In another moment the door burst open and a girl of fourteen rushed into the room, her face bright with excitement.

"Auntie May," she said, running up to Mrs. Carlton and throwing her arms around her, "I'm going to give mother a party."

"But she has just had one," ventured Mrs. Carlton, a little doubtfully.

"Now, Auntie," pleaded Blanche, "don't look at me like that. I'm determined to surprise mother again, because just after her birthday, I heard her tell someone she would know the signs the next time there was a party going on."

"Another secret, is it?" questioned Mrs. Carlton, smiling in sympathy.

"Yes," said Blanche. "I want to do it while Claire is away, so I will have all the responsibility," she added, following her aunt into the kitchen. "Oh, what grand looking chocolate!" her eyes falling on the cake.

"I don't understand your plan," persisted Mrs. Carlton. "You don't mean to ask the same people, dear? It has hardly been three weeks since your last surprise."

"But this is different," said Blanche eagerly. "No one is invited except my own uncles and aunts and my own uncles-in-law and aunts-in-law," she explained.

"Oh, a family party, is it? That's lovely, but have you forgotten that most of them have eight or ten miles to drive," asked Mrs. Carlton.

"I know," said Blanche, reaching for the bowl of chocolate her aunt held out, and running to the table with it, "and I found they couldn't come for supper or to spend the day, so there was nothing left to do but invent a new meal, and that's what I did. The hour is about as curious as the bill of fare. It will be four o'clock in the afternoon, and I am going to have sandwiches—sandwiches and then sandwiches—potted ham, cheese, peanut-butter, orange marmalade and lettuce; that's all the sandwiches I have thought of, yet, and potato salad and deviled eggs. Then maple mousse and spice cake. After that, 'coffee and repartee,'" she added with an important air, "and after dinner mints, of course."

"Have the mints, do," laughed her aunt, "unless the doctors around here are paying you a commission on the number of patients you bring them."

"It is rather a mix-up, isn't it? But it had to be, Auntie. I chose the things I could make in secret, don't you see. I have an Algebra lesson to study, I can't stay another minute," said Blanche, hurrying away. "Oh," coming back from the door, "I was about to forget the most exciting thing I had to tell you. Aunt Jean wants me to embroider her a daisy centerpiece. You know there aren't any more dandelions to pick, and I was wondering where my capital was to come from, when she asked me about it. I wouldn't be surprised if she knew I was financially embarrassed, but, if

she did, I just love her the more for doing it. I must go. I'll see you lots of times before Friday."

The five intervening days passed very quickly for Blanche. She often coaxed her mother out under the trees to a pleasant, shady spot, and there mother and daughter spent many happy hours together, Mrs. Merrill reading aloud while Blanche worked eagerly on the daisy centerpiece.

Wednesday evening Elizabeth Blake, who was in the secret and almost as excited as Blanche herself, came over just as Mrs. Merrill was leaving the house.

"Those daisies," said Blanche, spreading out her work for her friend to see, "pay for the sandwiches and salad and coffee and cake and even the eggs, everything except the cream. There in this corner that I haven't worked are the maple mousse. My party is almost ready."

"I didn't know you could embroider," said Elizabeth.

"Neither did I, till last Monday; don't you know about the dog that had to climb the tree? This was the time I had to embroider," said Blanche, laughing. "It isn't so bad, is it?"

"It could be worse," said the older girl, hurrying to change the subject.

Early the next afternoon, Blanche finished her last daisy, laundered the piece herself, took it to her aunt's and exchanged it for some quarters and dimes that jingled pleasantly in her purse and seemed to beat time to the happy, little song that was singing itself in her heart all the way home.

After supper, Elizabeth, who was to spend the night with Blanche, came over with her mother. Presently Mrs. Merrill and Mrs. Blake went out together, and the girls hurried to the kitchen.

"It will be safer to work in the garret," said Blanche. "I took the oil stove up today. We can boil the potatoes and eggs and make the dressing tonight. You load the tray as I direct. The first thing is water and plenty of it," she added, filling a pitcher. Turning suddenly, Blanche struck the tray and overturned the pitcher in her hand, which fell to the floor, pouring little, icy streams over Elizabeth's shoulder and all down her fresh, white dress. Blanche screamed in sympathy, but Elizabeth only shivered, and continued her search for the eggs.

"Never mind the pieces, Blanche," she said. "We will pick them up when we have more time. Oh, it doesn't matter about my dress. Suppose it had been the olive oil or the marmalade!"

"I wish," said Blanche, admiringly, "I could be as quiet and cool as you are."

"You wouldn't want to be quite so cool," interrupted her friend, laughing. "Hurry up, you have to give me a dress to put on. Oh, there are Nelle and Lelia. While you are bringing them in, I will make a selection from your wardrobe, if you can trust me," she said, running upstairs.

The Stanfords were favorites with all who knew them, so Blanche received them warmly and led the way to the kitchen. When Elizabeth joined them, they had two trays well loaded and were just starting to the garret.

It was a merry group that gathered in the big, dusky room.

"Nelle," began Blanche, "I want you to

peel the potatoes, because you are not wasteful like the rest of us, and the nutritious elements of the potatoes lie close to the skin. I heard Dr. Roland say so in his lecture at the high school the other day and I was much impressed. I didn't know doctors knew so many unnecessary things. Lelia," she continued, "you are to boil the eggs. There's the clock."

"What do I want with a clock?" asked Lelia. "I would rather have a fire."

"I brought the clock up to see whether you could boil them as fast as I can," said Blanche. "I'll light the stove for you in a minute. Meanwhile, Elizabeth is sitting here with folded hands."

"Let her peel these potatoes," interrupted Nelle. "It's out of my line, besides the knife is dull. Here, Elizabeth," dropping it down by her.

"The knife is not so sharp as you are, quite," said Elizabeth, "but I don't mind. The poorer the tool, the more glory to the workman. Watch me and be sorry you buried your talent."

"I'd dig it up again, if we had another knife," laughed Nelle, "but, as we haven't, I'll have to develop another talent. I know, I'll make the salad dressing. Let me, Blanche, will you?"

"Do you think you can?" asked Blanche, doubtfully. "Who drowned the matches, I'd like to know? I found them in that pan of water. Lelia, run down and bring me some and another paring knife, that's a dear."

"And a salad dish," added Elizabeth, with unnecessary forethought.

"Oh, here's a match that will strike, after all," rejoiced Blanche, when Lelia was gone. "I'm going to put these eggs on, or we will never get through. Can you make the mayonnaise, really?" turning to Nelle.

"I've never tried, but I am sure I can," said Nelle, modestly. "I think I'd better have a receipt, though."

"I would prefer some one with experience, but I hate to be impolite," said Blanche. "The receipt book is somewhere in the kitchen. Do you mind looking for it?"

Nelle started on a run, but she was back in a moment.

"Burglars, girls, oh, hurry!" she shouted.

They jumped to their feet in great excitement, Elizabeth overturning her pan and the potatoes preceding them down the steps.

"Wait a second," said Blanche, stopping at the door of her room. "Where's my pistol?"

Snatching up a collapsible combination coat and skirt banger, she snapped it as she ran, almost drowning the cries in the hall below. Before they were half way down stairs, Blanche realized that they were more in need of men than arms, for, instead of thieves, they found a lamp exploding, and Lelia—the brave, self-reliant Lelia—leaning helplessly against a wall.

The frightened girls pulled open the door and went crying into the yard, all but Nelle, who stepped up to the blazing lamp, and grasping it below the flame-covered bowl, quietly carried it into the yard, and there, with a couch cover snatched from the library, completely smothered the flames.

Ten minutes later the girls were on their way upstairs, all talking at once, when they heard a great pounding on the door.

"Fires within and foes without," quoted Blanche, with more fervor than accuracy.

"More likely the firemen," said practical Nelle. "I haven't a doubt someone heard you girls and turned in the alarm."

She proved a good prophet and the dis-